Which linguistics for which grammar?

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Introduction

This paper aims at presenting an 'original' theory of language – named Contrastive Linguistic Grammar - in the perspective of a discourse analysis approach. This approach to language mechanisms, based on contrastivity and comparison of languages, was developed by the French linguist and didactician Professor Henri Adamczewski. The results of more than twenty years of theoretical linguistic research in English grammar are published in *Grammaire Linguistique de l'Anglais* (1982, *GLA*)

Contrastive Linguistic Grammar (CLG) is also known as metaoperational grammar. In this grammar strong emphasis is laid on the unconscious language activity of the speaker, who constructs his utterances by means of abstract linguistic operations. But even if the latter are abstract, they are not invisible to the linguist who can find traces of them and pinpoint the morphological markers - called metaoperators - that designate these operations. He manages to explain the role played by these markers in the building of utterances and can give them a 'status' in the system. (i.e. the *role* played by an operator in the grammar of a specific language)

We do think that CLG can be very useful to the foreign language teacher. Grammatical contrastive analysis will reveal to the learner the natural relationship existing between his language, L1, and L2. It will reveal some linguistic principles - common to all languages - which underlie the language system. The latter is precisely what makes language learnable. So why not use L1 to learn and understand L2 better? This is the pedagogical aspect that makes CLG so different, for example, from Traditional Grammar or Descriptive Linguistics.

Traditional Grammar is different because it only offers rules to the learner of L2 that help him build correct sentences to improve his writing: it is a normative but not explanatory grammar. As to Descriptive Linguistics – for instance Structuralism – it only describes languages by means of procedures and techniques which are applied to utterances once they are produced by the speaker i.e: on a result. This approach, being intrinsically descriptive, focusses on the external organisation of the elements of the sentence but cannot explain, for example, how utterances have become *speech acts*. In linguistics, this question is fundamental because learning a language is learning how to produce speech acts, i.e. speech in context. Hence the necessity to provide also the L2 learner with an explanatory approach like CLG which will offer him / her clues to decode the unconscious knowledge the native speaker has of his language. CLG can be very useful to the linguist / teacher of L2 since the process of acquisition of L1 is different from the process of learning L2.

To understand grammar better, the non-native user of a language, who has no intuitive knowledge of the system of L2, needs clear, homogeneous and coherent answers to his questions. For example, if the native speaker is not 'upset' by the use of the Simple Past in :

(1) It's high time you called a taxi

the learner of L2 is 'perplexed' :how come that the verb 'call' is in the Past but the taxi has not arrived yet !

What do English grammars propose to explain the use of 'you called' instead of the expected present 'you call' ?

Traditional grammars justify the use of 'you called' by the occurrence of 'It's high time' and labels it 'unreal past'. On the other hand, the grammarian linguist R.Close (1975: 251) ex- plains that 'the Past simple is used to indicate present non-fact'. But this can only be regarded as an observation not an explanation.

To learn L2 correctly, the student *needs* to understand what the native speaker knows intuitively. To decode this linguistic intuition is what H.Adamczewski (1982: 5O) does when he puts forward the hypothesis that unreal past is a metalinguistic past, that it is 'a past of construction' which differs from a chronological past. In English grammar, to *comment* on a situation - for example on 'the taxi's arrival' (1) - the speaker has first to presuppose this arrival, and then in a second operation he can make a

comment like : 'It's high time...' The morpheme –ed of the Simple past will become the material representation of an unconscious 'linguistic metaoperation' made by the speaker. In this sense, the Past 'you called' is not a chronological past but a past of construction.

Let's consider now other examples to illustrate the limits of traditional grammars :

(2) John is decorating his house.

(3) It has been snowing!

(4) She is working tomorrow.

Although the situations are different, the Progressive aspect is used in the three of them. A foreign language teacher should be particularly interested in the comments traditional gram- mars propose to justify the use of the Progressive in the above examples.

What do grammars say ?

- in (2), there is an action in progress but not necessarily now

- in (3), although it is not snowing , the Progressive is justified by the snow on the soil at the moment of speaking. Leech (1971: 46) explains that 'the effects of the activity are still visible'. In other words, the action persists in its results.

in (4), an action planned in a near future justifies the use of the Progressive.

So, in summary, grammars associate the use of the Progressive with :

'duration, limited duration, action in progress, repetition of the action, near future. And if the form BE+ING occurs in ten different contexts, grammars will propose ten different interpre- tations and meanings of this form.

We personally wonder how a traditional exhaustive list of the numerous uses of BE+ING can help the learner understand the use of the Progressive. Anyone but a pedagogue can make a list and give it to learners as an answer because lists are neither pedagogical answers nor pedagogical tools.

We do think that the problem lies in the *metalanguage and method* because a grammar, worthy of this name, must develop a metalanguage that throws light on the linguistic principles of language, a metalanguage that gives explanations not interpretations to the surface structures of utterances, i.e. to linearity. With the development of modern linguistics, it has been agreed that language is a system. Consequently, we can ask this question :

If L2 is a language system like L1, what intuitive and homogeneous knowledge has the native speaker of BE+ING when he uses the Progressive in these different contexts?

Some embarassing questions are sometimes asked by clever and curious students to emba- rassed teachers, as for example : How can we possibly give to BE+ING the value of the future in :

> She is working tomorrow

and relate it to a finished action in :

> It has been snowing

This type of questions is extremely interesting and targets the core of the problem.The student of L2, who asked them, has certainly felt the lack of logic and coherence in the grammatical definition of BE+ING. His questioning is sensible but which answer can grammar propose to him?

If we want to give to the the student's question a linguistic orientation we can rephrase it as follows :

If the English language is a system, how can BE+ING take 'different meanings' in 'different contexts'?

For the native speaker, it is obvious that BE+ING has *one* linguistic 'value' (i.e one single meaning). This value can be called the INVARIANT, i.e. the meaning of BE+ING in the grammar of English.. So what 'unconscious' linguistic value does BE+ING have in the na- tive speaker's mind? This is exactly what the research of CLG aims at discovering.

Descriptive grammars show their limits when they tackle questions where the decoding of linguistic metaoperations becomes necessary to understand some particular uses of English grammar. In this case, we can say that the metalinguistic level gets the upper hand over the linguistic one, i.e. over linearity as in the following :

> It's high time you called a taxi ./ If I were rich. ...

Hence, the fundamental distinction made by CLG, between two levels :

(i) the level of linearity

(ii) the metalinguistic level

The linear level: it is the level of words where the words of the speaker are arranged. It is the visible one.

The metalinguistic level: it is the level where the metaoperations - i.e. the unconscious lin- guistic activity of the speaker - take place. It is the invisible one.

Understanding the grammar of a foreign language becomes difficult for the learner but inter- esting for the linguist when the order of the metaoperations does not always correspond to the linear order of the words of the utterance. If this discrepancy does not 'disturb' the speaker of L1, it 'perturbs' the learner of L2 who needs landmarks to understand a foreign language grammar.

We suggest that the language teacher can help the L2 learner find them.

Some applications of Contrastive Linguistic Grammar

1 DO/DID in the English grammar

Prescriptive and descriptive grammars have divided the sentence into Subject and Predicate and NP+VP, where the Verb agrees with the Subject as in :

(5) John openS the door

But if we say

(5') DoeS John open the door ?

(5'') He doeS not open the door.

(5''') He doeS open the door

the -s of the verb 'open' has been dropped. The verb takes no - s but the marker DO does. Why? What metalanguage can explain the emergence of DO to the learner of L2 ?

Descriptive grammars themselves have not decoded the function of DO in the grammar of English : they have only described it.

The same remark can be made about the following:

(6) John speakS English

(6') John CAN speak English

In (6) the verb takes -s and there is no modal CAN.

In (6') the verb takes no -s and there is CAN

To summarize we note the absence of -s when there is 'interrogation, negation, emphasis and use of modals'.

These short sentences can be used, in class, as pedagogical examples to teach systematicity in the grammar of English, *i.e systematicity in language.* The teacher/linguist can seize this opportunity and ask a TRUE question :

What justifies the presence of DO and the absence of -s in these examples ?

Teacher and learners can reflect together on this linguistic aspect to find a coherent answer.

CLG proposes a set of linguistic tools to explain issues of the type mentionned above like :

- Predication

- Grammatical Subject Vs Speaker (Adamczewski, 1982)

- Concept of Saturation (Adamczewski, 1977)

- Thematic relation Vs Rhematic relation (Adamczewski, 1982)

We will use this metalanguage to explain the role the English metaoperators DO and BE+ING play in the grammar of English.

When a Speaker produces an utterance, he relates a Subject AND a Predicate. The two together make the Predication. In CLG, the Predication is the Nexus. It is the most funda- mental because it is the *first* necessary metaoperation the Speaker makes when he produces an utterance. We can call it the predicational BIND.

In CLG, the distinction made between the Speaker, who produces the utterance, who binds the Predication and the grammatical Subject (subject of the sentence) is a basic distinction one.

When a speaker says :

He DID open the door

he is not being neutral. He is modalising his speech. In French, we would translate it into :

Il a BIEN ouvert la porte .

where BIEN is clearly a modal.The emergence of DID, like BIEN, has a relation with *modality* (GLA 1982: 83)

In the grammar of English, to modalise, to negate (negation is also a modality), and to question, the speaker must first make an unconscious metalinguistic operation that DO/DID signals. *DO/DID is the marker of the predicational bind at the linear level.* In this sense, it is *a metaoperator.*

Why is this **bind** so important ?

In the grammar of English, two operations cannot take place simultaneously, i.e.:

- to bind the predicational relation
- and to comment on it (emphasis, negation ...)

In an initial linguistic operation, the SPEAKER relates the predication and marks the bind by means of DO/DID. In other words, he *presupposes* the relation in order to say something about it: the relation becomes *thematic*. The same observation can be made about interro- gation. To ask a question, the speaker must presuppose the predication .

H.Adamczewski says that the predicational relation is *saturated*, in other words it is presupposed, thematic.('Saturation' is a linguistic principle that exists in other languages; in Arabic for example we found and analysed similar linguistic mechanisms)

In the second linguistic operation, DO/DID becomes the *target* of the modality (the target of the emphasis in 'He DID open the door'). Emphasis, negation, interrogation are the second operations. As they are new we may call them *rhematic* operations.

Why is there no DO in :

He openED the door

Because, here, the Speaker simply signals the predicational bind (grammatical subject-predicate) by means of -ED. There is no DO because there is no modality. The Speaker is neutral, the relation is rhematic.

In :

He DOES not open the door

we note the position of DOES, between the Grammatical Subject and the Predicate, a DOES that NOT negates We also notice that the verb cannot take the suffixes- s and -ed since there is absence of relation between the Grammatical Subject and the Predicate.

In summary, one fundamental linguistic principle of the English grammar is to presuppose the predicational relation before a second operation can take place. This is what **saturation** means in CLG (presupposition is possible when there is saturation of the predication , when subject and predicate are related by means of a metaoperation)

2 BE+ING in the English grammar

BE+ING is another metaoperator the English grammatical system uses as a marker of the predicational bind and of **presupposition.**

Let us consider a few examples from **GLA** (Chapter 3) to illustrate the uses of BE+ING.

(7) You've been eating fish !

(8) He has been drinking.

(9) She has been crying

(10) Someone has been eating my porridge.

(11) I am accepting no invitation.

(12) When a girl of twenty marries a man of eighty, it is obvious that she is marrying him for money.

(13) When she says she took the money, she is lying.

(14) A : Is anything the matter ?

    B : Pardon ?

    A : I am asking you if there is anything the matter ?

(15) I will be seeing him tomorrow

(15') I will see him tomorrow

(16) Peter resembles his father.

(16') Peter is resembling his father. (grammatically incorrect . . .)

(16'') Peter is resembling his father *more and more*. (correct. !)

(17) Be careful, John has painted the door ! (ungrammatical)

(17') Be careful, John has been painting the door. (correct !)

Before we comment on these examples, we would like to underline an important point :

- in CLG, a pertinent remark is one that can explain ALL the uses of BE+ING (as we are looking for ONE VALUE for BE+ING in the grammar of English).

First, two remarks can be made about BE+ING utterances:

(i) if the definition of 'duration' is the development of an action in a span of time (a developing action being opposed to a 'punctual' one), we can observe that this notion is absent in all these examples (7- 17')

(ii) The contexts of BE+ING utterances are never trivial, linguistically speaking.

Let us now examine the examples one by one.

- In (7) the speaker wants to say ' you have been eating fish **because** you smell fish.'

In French , we can translate it into: ((On dirait que) tu as mangé du poisson, toi)

- In (8) the speaker CAN smell alcohol.

In French : Il a VISIBLEMENT bu. (Il est evident qu'il a bu)

H.Adamczewski claims that 'visiblement' is different from an adverb like : 'calmement'

(in :'Il a calmement bu.', c'est sa façon de boire qui était calme (GLA, Chapter III)

- In (9) 'Her eyes are red', can be translated into 'Ma parole, elle a pleuré !'

- In (10) we can translate it into ' Quelqu'un a touché à mon porridge' (It is evident that someone has been eating my porridge)

- In (11) the context is very important. An argument about invitations must have preceded the production of the utterance.

- In (12) we have the adjective 'obvious' but no idea of duration, limited duration, repetition or near future. The speaker gives a personal opinion about a girl who marries a man of eighty. The idea of duration is excluded because she is not marrying him now.

- In (13) Who says 'she is lying'? The speaker does. It is HIS opinion.

- In (14) the repetition of the predicate is interesting from the metalinguistic point of view..(In discourse analysis a repetition is never fortuitous. The speaker repeats the **presupposed** predication)

- In (15) the speaker uses BE+ING because there is presupposition .The meeting has already been arranged. When the idea is 'new', the speaker uses WILL.

- Sentence (16) is correct . The speaker is neutral. The verb takes the –s of the predicational bind : grammatical subject and predicate

- Sentence (16') - with BE+ING - is incorrect. For the native speaker, something is missing. Sentence (16'') is : Sentence 2 + more and more : and this sentence is correct !

In this sentence (16'') the speaker has used BE+ING which is a modalising verbal form. He is saying something about the resemblance : so modality is *necessary*.

- In Sentence (17) the speaker cannot comment ('Be careful') on the action of painting because the present perfect does not carry presupposition. Instead he must use BE+ING which is the marker and the 'carrier' of the presupposed and *thematic* predicational bind, hence a correct sentence (17').

What conclusion can we draw from the study of these examples ?

Contrastive linguistic research aims at finding the 'most metalinguistic' utterances to decode complex metaoperations at the linear level and some languages being 'more metalinguistic' than others, linguists can use contrastivity to *highlight* and decode 'less metalinguistic'ones. On the other hand we would like also to insist on the fact that in CLG linguists do not make their utterances but pick them in novels, newspapers etc. It is a grammar of discourse and all the examples are attested.

3. The Progressive BE+ING and the notion of duration

If BE+ING indicates 'duration', how can we possibly have :

(17) Inch by inch, he opened the door and entered the room.

(**GLA**, Chapter III)

Instead, we have a verb with –ED. In this example, the Speaker *says* something (his attitude is neutral). He relates he + opened the door and -ed symbolises the *bind*.

The relation is *rhematic*. The speaker describes a situation.

The central question remains :

What 'invariable' value/function does BE+ING have in the grammar of English ?

In other words, what 'invariable remark' can a linguist make about statements with BE+ING ?

We can deduce that with BE+ING the speaker does not 'say' something but as Austin (1962) stated, the speaker ' *does* something with words'. We are in *modality, in presupposition.*

BE+ING, like DO, needs a thematic predication (presupposed) to modalise the utterance.

-ING, like DO, signals this presupposition. So -ING is a metaoperator. In :

(18) He always gets up early = (every day he gets up early)

The *target* of 'always' is early : (he / gets up / always early) The Predication is 'tertiary.'   1   2   3

But in

(18') He is always getting up early ! = (I wonder why !)

we have :   always   He / is getting up early
                         1   2

BE+ING has made the predication *binary,* where Subject +Predicate form a block.(GLA, Chapter III)

In a second operation, the modality 'always' targets the predicational bind that - ING symbolises.

In summary, the speaker cannot modalise his speech if the relation grammatical subject- -predicate is not made. This operation must be prior.

4 BE+ING versus the French 'Imparfait'

There is, in French, a tense called the IMPARFAIT which presents the characteristics of the English Progressive BE+ING.(**GLA,** Chapter III)

French grammars use the same label 'Progressive aspect' to describe the Imparfait (in French l'aspect duratif de l'imparfait) and oppose it to the' Punctual' Passé Simple.

But how can a native speaker produce the following utterances :

(19) Deux minutes avant la fin Platini marquAIT le but de la victoire !

(20) Encore un peu, et tu renversAIS le café! (**GLA,** 1982)

Two remarks can be made :

(i) There is definitely no idea of duration

(ii) In both utterances, the speaker modalises his speech. And modality is possible when the predication is *first presupposed.*

We only suggest that, in class, teacher and students can discuss the French and English progressive aspects in order to see if their mechanisms

can be compared and contrasted in the following way as the comparison is linguistically interesting (**GLA**, Chapter III)

The IMPARFAIT, like BE+ING, is a modalising verbal form that carries presupposition. It presupposes the existence of this *binary* predication :

Platini + marquait le but de la victoire.

where the verb and its object form 'one' block.. -AIT is the symbol of the predicational bind.

In a second operation AIT becomes the 'target' of the speaker's modalisation :

2 minutes avant la fin (in 19) / Encore un peu. (in 2O)

We can conclude that:

- in French, the Imparfait is the verbal form used when there is presupposition, i.e when the Speaker 'does something with words' (Austin, 1962).

The Speaker 'does something with words' when he declares for instance :

(21) I DECLARE the meeting open

In this sentence, the Speaker who has used a 'performative verb' cannot be neutral ! .

The absence of the verb -Is ('the –Is' that we find in : 'The meeting is open' for example) recalls the absence of -s in 'John can speak English'. In (21) the Speaker is modalising his speech. He is not 'saying' something about the meeting but he is 'doing something with words'. He is 'acting' when he says 'I declare…'. For this reason, the verb –Is that would have symbolized the predicational bind between 'meeting / open'– in a non performative utterance- has disappeared since modality prevails in example (21). In the latter, 'doing' is ' more important' for the Speaker than 'saying'. In English grammar, this fact is symbolized by the omission of the predicational marker, -Is.

Conclusion

The intent in this paper was not to urge language teachers to use this particular Contrastive Linguistic Grammar. We have presented it to assert that the study of grammar can be sometimes fascinating when the teacher, with students, look *beyond the words* and when there is *reflection* in class...

H. Adamczewski's grammar (1982) proposes an abtract but coherent linguistic approach to language that moves away from the linear level of language and requires metalinguistic concepts.

Grammaire Linguistique de l'Anglais might 'frighten' the teachers who are used to a comfortable linear level of language but we may remind them of what should not be a vain refrain: *language is a system and some of its principles can only be decoded at the metalinguistic level.*

Two conditions are however necessary to use **GLA** :

1- the language teacher must be himself/herself a linguist, **GLA** demanding linguistic knowledge, linguistic maturity and teaching experience.

2- language learners must be prepared to quit the linear level of language, to which tradi- tional grammar and some linguistic schools have given an exclusive place in the study of language.

The first contact with **GLA** should arouse the curiosity of the learner. **GLA** has tools that help students look beyond the external arrangement of sentences, beyond syntax, to find true an- swers to their questions..

Finally we would like to say that if languages are different some of their intrinsic linguistic operations can hide similar mechanisms. Noam Chomsky calls them: Universals of Language. In **GLA**, H.Adamczewski also 'analyses' these common mechanisms .The English metaoperator DO - which we compared with the Arabic metaoperator BAL in our thesis - (Bakiri, 1986) - and the English progressive verbal form BE+ING that H.Adamczewki compared with the French Imparfait are minute examples - among many others studied in **GLA** - that illustrate similarity in languages .

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